

DOVE, SARAH JEANETTE, M.A. The Choreography and Performance of Religion: Power and Ritual within American Pentecostal Worship Practice in the U.S. (2015)  
Directed by Dr. Jill Green. 76 pp.

Over eight weeks and within four different churches, I observed American Pentecostal worship in Columbus, Ohio and Greensboro, North Carolina through the lens of dance. Specifically, dance is used as a means to discuss cultural practices that are not regularly associated with or interpreted as dance. Using the *docile bodies* theory by Michel Foucault, this research expands upon the way that bodies are conditioned to practice correct behavior as a part of Pentecostal worship. This study draws upon the postulations of Judith Butler in discussing gender performativity. Additionally, a framework suggested by Susan Leigh Foster to use dance, specifically choreographic practice, as a means to examine and dissect cultural phenomena is utilized. These theories allow for a rich and diverse explanation for the action of collected and individual bodies within cultural practice.

Using these combined theories to interpret Pentecostal worship, this study isolates the roles of power and ritual as directly related to ideas of choreography and performance in dance. This research discusses constructions of power through spatial positioning and social conditioning as related to the choreographic process. It then examines ritual action as performed behavior in direct relation to the power that has been enacted. From the positioning of bodies in space, to the actions of those bodies, the focus of this study is the demystification of spontaneous acts within Pentecostal worship in the U.S.

THE CHOREOGRAPHY AND PERFORMANCE OF RELIGION:  
POWER AND RITUAL WITHIN AMERICAN  
PENTECOSTAL WORSHIP PRACTICE  
IN THE U.S.

by

Sarah Jeanette Dove

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Greensboro  
2015

Approved by

---

Committee Chair

© 2015 Sarah Jeanette Dove

To Jarod, without whom  
I could never have completed  
this journey.

## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by SARAH JEANETTE DOVE has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A great deal of thanks to my committee members, Dr. Jill Green, committee chair, Dr. William Hart, Dr. Ana Paula Höfling, and Cynthia Ling Lee, MFA, for their dedication to and input on this project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. OBSERVATIONS.....	10
III. THEORETICAL POSITIONINGS .....	14
Concerning Power.....	14
Concerning Ritual .....	20
Intersections .....	23
IV. ASSERTIONS.....	25
V. CHOREOGRAPHING POWER .....	29
Cultivated Spaces.....	32
Corporeal Positioning .....	37
Power as Choreography .....	43
VI. PRESENTATIONS.....	44
VII. PERFORMING RITUAL.....	47
Ritualized Behaviors and the Individual.....	51
Collected Bodies in Collective Spaces .....	56
Ritualized Performance.....	60
VIII. INTERSECTIONS .....	62
IX. CONCLUSION .....	66
REFERENCES .....	75

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Dance, including its collection of codified technical and pedagogical practices, is an interesting framework to use for the purpose of discussing cultural phenomena. Where performance studies introduced a moving lens through which to view culturally constructed ideas, such as gender performativity, the singling out of dance as a performative practice goes a step further in offering a different explanation of culturally normalized behaviors (Butler 1988, 2). Unique to dance is the choreographic process which provides performers with the vocabulary necessary to complete a dance. Additionally, the tools used for designing choreography allow for meaning to be interpreted in unique ways. Judith Butler states, “like performativity, choreography consists in sets of norms and conventions; yet unlike performativity, or at least its general usage thus far, choreography encompasses corporeal as well as verbal articulateness” (Foster 1998, 6). It is this focus on bodily action as central to the meaning that choreography applies to the dissection of Christian, specifically American Pentecostal, worship practice in the United States. In other words, choreography goes beyond the basic understanding of performativity in terms of output, and enhances it by adding a deeper, more embodied knowledge. For worship, this means a foregrounding of the body as the subject of the practice, and the object of inquiry.



The degree to which worship can be interpreted as dance is related directly to the depth to which worship becomes corporeal. For different denominations or sects of religious practice, specifically Eurocentric Christianity, there are different levels to which this embodiment manifests. In liturgical traditions, such as Catholicism and Lutheranism, worship patterns or rituals exist as a means through which to express long-term dedication. The actions performed usually reflect the verbal traditions that they represent. The guidelines to which these practitioners adhere is directly related to the prescriptions laid down in Biblical text or similar theological documents that describe correct performance. The performances here include great attention to detail, and calculated repetitions of movement in order to ensure consistency. However, in charismatic practice, such as Pentecostalism, there is a focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit—a spiritual being in protestant Christian practice, especially Pentecostalism, that forms one third of the Holy triumvirate alongside God, the father, and Jesus Christ, the son—as the primary initiator of the actions that participants perform. While Biblical texts are also important in Pentecostalism, they exist more as a mean for affirmation of the actions performed in worship. The coming of the Holy Spirit mirrors the original phenomenon at the Feast of Pentecost described in the book of Acts in the New Testament. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes available to all the ability to prophesy and witness miracles, thus the goal of worship becomes the regular recreation of a space in which this is possible. A predominant belief exists that accepts spontaneous action in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Yet, in divergent locations with no apparent connection to one another, the

performance by participants in the supposed presence of the Holy Spirit, is largely read in the same manner concerning the progression of the service and the emotional displays of the individual. Moreover, there tends to be a canon of movements and vocalizations from which participants in Pentecostal worship performance choose, executing them with the expert skill. Considering a phenomenon such as Pentecostal worship practice in terms of sterile, calculated construction is uncommon due to the pervasive attitude amongst its devotees that its actions are spontaneous. Thus, I intend to discuss the organization and execution of worship behavior present within Pentecostalism that necessitate its weekly performance in terms of dance choreography and performance in order to demystify this assumption.

For many years in my early youth, I was deeply immersed in Christian practice. Because my father was a minister, my family went to church regularly and I also attended a Christian school affiliated with the Assemblies of God denomination—a Pentecostal practice—from kindergarten until my sophomore year of high school. The longer I was involved in the realm of Pentecostal Christianity, the more important it became for me to question the expectations that accompanied participation and acceptance within it. However, as I asked more questions, I was met with increasing repudiation from those in positions of authority, particularly teachers and chaplains where I attended school. In my experience, when critical analysis enters into the realm of religious acts within Pentecostal Christianity, there is, typically, a defensive attitude surrounding what is perceived as criticism. Still, Pentecostal Christianity as a pervasive social practice can be

of interest when considering the construction and execution of learned behaviors, especially within worship practice. This is not to say that the acts that take place within Pentecostalism require criticism. But they, like many other social constructs, can lead to scrutiny in seeking to understand the purpose of what is acceptable or expected within this particular setting. It is this mode of questioning that was the catalyst for this inquiry.

The tradition of ethnography has often involved researching the social “other.” Particularly in its early history, ethnography used dominant means of interpretation to discuss non-dominant cultures. It is possible that ethnographers believed themselves to be more capable of objectivity in this role. Ethnography has also sought to gain entry, as an outsider, into non-dominant cultures for the purpose of speaking for the cultural other. The predominant goal was to receive the label of insider. Once obtained, this label affords the researcher a level of privilege that perpetuates his/her ability to compare or contrast dominant and non-dominant practices. This method of ethnography is marred, though, by a colonial tradition that perpetuates an elitist value of one practice or culture over another. In more recent tradition, which includes the research of native ethnographers, the position of insider is occupied by the researcher at the outset of the research. This researcher seeks clear and equitable interpretation for intimate practice and cultural knowledge. It is central to this position to criticize or praise deeply engrained elements of personal experience. The ethnographic inquiry for this study attempts to synthesize these two positions. At one time, I occupied the position of insider within Pentecostalism. After more than a decade, I feel enough distance from the practice to label myself outsider.

However, I still possess knowledge of the movement and spoken vernacular, allowing me a unique critical perspective: that of insider-outsider.

After a long separation, I decided to reinsert myself in the worship of Pentecostal Christianity as observer in order to interpret worship behaviors through the eyes of a dancer. In observation, I decided it would be more beneficial to keep past emotion and experience at an arm's length in order to more clearly view and interpret the atmosphere of worship within a community of current practitioners. This led me to consider myself as an audience member more than a participant, both giving myself protection through physical distance, and allowing myself to maintaining a critical perspective. The primary objective of this reinsertion was to analyze in a manner parallel to a dance expert looking at a performance piece. Within eight weeks, I visited four different churches in the Columbus, Ohio, and Greensboro, North Carolina, metropolitan areas. Upon entering the research, I had already determined that the predominant themes that I would be seeking to analyze would deal with the presence of power dynamics and ritual behaviors.

The way that I will discuss worship practice in terms of dance, specifically choreography and performance, draws directly upon Susan Leigh Foster's framework from "Choreography of Protest." (Foster 2003). Specifically, this study is not interested in a strict back and forth comparison of the many ways in which dance and worship practice mirror one another. Though it is important to acknowledge that the development of power relationships and ritual actions in each practice can be discussed similarly, this research views this development as the specific choreographic process of Pentecostal

worship. As a dance artist claiming the unique views of insider-outsider, this research asks of cultural phenomena the same questions present in Foster's work:

what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; what choreography, whether spontaneous or pre-determined, do they enact?; what kinds of significance and impact does the collection of bodies make in the midst of its social surround?; how does the choreography theorize corporeal, individual, and social identity?;...how have these bodies been trained, and how has that training mastered, cultivated, or facilitated their impulses?; what do they share that allows them to move with one another?; what kind of relationships do they establish with those who are watching their actions?; what kinds of connections can be traced between their daily routines and the special moments of their [worship]?; how is it possible to reconstruct and translate into words these bodies' vanished actions?; how is the body of the researcher/writer implicated in the investigation? (3-4)

Each of the above questions can be separated into groupings that represent the presence of power and the role of ritual behavior in Pentecostalism. Collected in these groupings, they guide the investigation toward a clarification of the complex, if not always apparent, ways in which Pentecostalism can be interpreted as cultivated rather than spontaneously motivated. One of the most brilliant illusions embedded within Pentecostalism is the idea that God's presence enacts actions within believers that defy explanation. But when phenomena such as this are seen through the lens of a tradition that occupies similar corporeal situations, the illusion becomes clarified and explainable.

These questions, will frame the two larger foci of this particular research study. First, some of the above questions deal directly with relationships; relationships of one participant to another, relationships between participants and those watching them, and

relationships for the participant to the actions that their bodies create, among others.

These questions are specifically,

what kinds of significance and impact does the collection of bodies make in the midst of its social surround? how does the choreography theorize corporeal, individual, and social identity?;...how have these bodies been trained, and how has that training mastered, cultivated, or facilitated their impulses?; what do they share that allows them to move with one another?; [and] what kind of relationships do they establish with those who are watching their actions? (3).

What is of key importance in these relationships is the distribution of power from one body or idea to another and how that power is used. In the first part of the third chapter of this study, I will discuss the theoretical background that illuminates the dynamics of power and how power initiates inspiration for choreographic creation.

The other questions deal with the interpretation of action that situate it beyond mundane, routine behavior or movement. The action approaches new meaning when it begins to represent more than task-oriented behaviors associated with basic living and survival. There is also a greater care for the physical situation or placement in space and in relations to others when undertaking such actions. This expresses a closer interpretation of this action or behavior as ritual. The questions that display this connection are,

what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; what choreography, whether spontaneous or pre-determined, do they enact?; what kinds of connections can be traced between their daily routines and the special moments of their [worship]?; how is it possible to reconstruct and translate into words these bodies' vanished actions? (3-4)

The discussion of ritual and how it can be used to interpret the above questions in this study, especially concerning the actions that construct ritual, follows a framework presented by Catherine Bell.

Central to this discussion, which will be discussed in a latter part of this investigation, is the introduction of the researcher as a theoretician. This identity becomes capable of interpreting these moments and the intersections that they present between thought and belief. Since this is the position that I am assuming, Foster's final question, "how is the body of the researcher/writer implicated in the investigation?," is able to also be included in the complex layers that are created concerning power and ritual (4). The role assumed as researcher thus becomes one in which history of the researcher as former Pentecostal practitioner and current dance artist will contribute to the way in which power is perceived in the design of worship performance, and ritual is interpreted in the action being observed. I introduce the impact that my intended and actual positioning has on the research being conducted in intermittent, reflective, even-numbered chapters. These musings serve the purpose of setting-up the analysis that will follow, as well as exposing the intended and unintended role of researcher due to biased interpretation.

The theoretical frameworks presented in the third chapter will be used as the groundwork for the critical analysis of Pentecostal worship that will be presented in the following chapters. The questions that I am borrowing from Foster will be strategically answered based upon generalized research findings that were interpreted through observations undertaken as a part of this study. At first, each section will be approached

separately in order to clarify the various means for the application of power and the execution of ritual within Pentecostal Christian worship. The synthesis of these separate discussions will then result in discussing the overall argument that this study seeks to divulge: that the illusion of Pentecostal worship behavior as spontaneous can be dissected and newly understood in terms of power relationships and ritual action vis-à-vis choreography and performance. More to the point, it is of interest in this research to deconstruct the layers of sacredness that elevate Pentecostalism beyond the reach of critical analysis. I propose that this can be done by fixing it with an opposing lens, and opening a dialogue around and through which similar ethereal cultural practices can be discussed.



## CHAPTER II

### OBSERVATIONS

Greensboro, North Carolina. November 2014. Impressions from the first church:

Upon entering the sanctuary space, I notice that the layout lends well to the interpretation of the space in a theatrical way. Specifically, there is a stage, and seating that suggests an audience will soon be present. I elect to sit in the balcony. From this vantage point I notice that the screen displays a countdown to the worship service. Does this vantage point allow me to more clearly analyze what I see because I do not feel the need to add my body to the collected worshipers around me? What does it mean for me to situate myself as “passive?” Is my sitting up here able to be read as “passive” because of the physical distance between myself and the rest of the congregants? The elevated stage platform is surrounded by two hundred to three hundred chairs arranged in a fan formation. Dim lighting sets the mood. A soft glow emanates from the stage, from six luminescent block columns, making it the focal point. Above this, and situated centrally in the entire space, is an illuminated cross. Soft “canned” worship music is also playing over the loud speaker as people enter. I wonder who might notice, or how one might notice, if this music was absent, and the soundtrack to people’s entrance was simply voices talking to one another. The tone set by this music and this atmosphere is what I interpret as introspective and is meant to elicit feelings of respect and piety. As the

worship service begins, I begin to feel satisfaction in what I am seeing, as it very closely follows predictions about what I believed would happen.

The production of this practice is impressive. Perhaps that is why there is no resistance in considering whether or not to immediately follow the suggestions given by anyone who is set in a position of authority. Verbal cueing and physicality utilized by the worship team provide examples of correct performance to the congregants. It is also interesting to me thinking about my past experiences, as well as the observations that I have made today, to note that there is typically more engaged performance when the songs are slower. More often than not, this coincides with how long the worship has been going on; in other words, faster songs are sung first with a celebratory message, and slower songs are sung later with a more suggestive message. There are key moments of vocal cueing from worship leaders. During these moments, it appears not only that more people feel encouraged toward active participation, but that those who are already participating are encouraged toward a more embodied participation.

Older members of the congregation appear to be more active participants than younger bodies. I did not initially anticipate that it would be necessary for me to stay for the entire service, only the worship portion. But I think it is relevant in understanding and paralleling this practice to dance to stay for the duration. The sermon discusses the necessity of worship in maintaining and nurturing spirituality. It is relevant, I think, to the understanding of training. I notice also that there are very few people who resist, but those that resist do it knowingly, almost defiantly.

Perhaps the most interesting moment for me was that at one point in the message, the pastor directs a comment about the training of youth to one very particular area of the sanctuary. I interpret this to mean that this was where the youth are located. It is interesting to me because of the training that I see as being a part of understanding how to properly behave within worship. I had forgotten, but was almost immediately reminded that worship is in some way almost always present at the end of the message for the purpose of providing a reason for congregants to come forward in prayer or confession. This time is meant for what I interpret as a very public display of private struggle. Public because they gather at the altar, in front of all those gathered; private because of the personal nature of confession. It is also of note that repetition is central in the encouragement of how behavior is learned, how to increase dedicated and correct performance, etc.

I remind myself that I must remain reflexive in my opinion of the bodies taking part in this worship. I do not know and have no intention of knowing them. I must not apply irony or hypocrisy to their action, as I have nothing to base that qualification upon. The sanctuary was set up for a “communion.” I wondered if someone might make the trip upstairs in order to offer me the chance to partake. I hoped that this would not happen, as I was the only person sitting in the balcony, and purposely tried not to draw much attention to myself. I had a clear view of the congregants and worship leaders without having to sit on the edge on my seat. It turns out that I was not bothered, no one came upstairs.

I notice that as I am considering the intensity of the actions of those around me, that my body begins to react to the upbeat tempo and major mode. My heel is tapping in time and my body feels engaged, not necessarily with the message of the music, but with the atmosphere being created. There is a clear attempt at leveling the playing field, when congregants are addressed as “brothers.” Brothers supposes that connection of the one delivering speech with those listening, but the “presence” of God denotes the true authority in the space: the voice of judgement, the one to be appeased, the one eliciting gaze, etc.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL POSITIONING

#### **Concerning Power**

The ubiquitous power at work in Pentecostal worship can be explored by consulting Michel Foucault's *docile bodies* theory. This is a theory that assumes that through careful, calculated conditioning, individuals come to accept varying modes of physical discipline. It regards the individual body as a "target of power" through which meaning can be constructed (Foucault 1984, 179). In *docile bodies*, there is a prevalent reading of the body as primed for social construction, allowing figures of authority to inscribe the values and norms of a specific practice upon them. Foucault primarily discusses the examples of military bodies that show the body as vessel of inscription. He describes soldier's movements and postures as marked by "a bodily rhetoric of honor" (179). *Docile bodies* also assumes that the bodies are willing participants, content to accept the strictures and codes of the practice that they are studying. Furthermore, there is fervency and joy in accepting the position of steward of the intended discipline.

There can be no doubt as to the existence of power relationships within worship practice. Parallel to the discussion of military bodies, I would identify the inscription of a bodily rhetoric of piety onto the bodies of worshipers. Moreover, there are at any given time multiple possible relationships of power at play. These relationships elicit control

from one body onto another for the purpose of regulation and subjugation. Instead, a more pointed investigation would be examining who holds power at any given time, in what way, and for what purpose, from one individual or group to another. In considering American Pentecostal worship practice, it is relevant to discuss the means through which power is enacted upon different bodies or participants. Perhaps the most obvious way in which power can be distinguished is through an authoritarian subject-object relationship. I am referring here to the relationship between pastor, or spiritual leader, and worshiper. This relationship is defined by Michel Foucault as imposing *docility*. The authoritarian person is set apart as facilitator of training and vehicle for accountability. This power recognizes that “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (180). The idea of subjection and usage correlate directly to the training of individuals in which the body is viewed as “analyzable,” while transformability and improvement set the body up as “manipulable” (180). These two facets define the docile body upon which “uninterrupted, constant coercion” and supervision are enacted through strict regulations of set behaviors (181). When bodies can be viewed as able to be analyzed, there is an understanding that these bodies accept subjugation as a means for training so that they might gain higher standing in the community of believers. This training denotes a degree of acceptance on the part of the individual participants, defining the ways in which control can be asserted, and situating them firmly within the power relationship.

Additionally, control is maintained over individual worshipers even when they are not under the direct supervision of a physical presence. This is due to the possibility that there are other presences asserting power. More specifically, it is not just the tangible body of the pastor or worship leader that causes the worshiper to want to behave obediently. In fact, and further along the lines of revered obedience, it is the omniscient presence of God, more than pastor, that maintains a deep and powerful control over the actions of the body, especially in worship. This relationship of power is present in the Biblical dictum found in the New Testament, “therefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt 7:16, *King James Translation*). In other words, actions of performance make apparent the practice to which the performers subscribe. This translates to the control that lingers over a participant causing them to follow a behavioral code. They follow a code knowing that these actions are potentially being observed by outsiders. Furthermore, as worship participants seek to appease and glorify God in behaving correctly, the power enacted follows a panoptic modality. This is a power that has the ability to “see without being seen,” and yet to elicit appropriate action from those that accept this relationship (Foucault 1984, 189). The individual operates under specific directives in full awareness that even though they cannot see or interact with this power, that it can see them at any time. Thus, because this power operates to judge the fervency of the participant’s devotion, they must constantly strive to demonstrate it. Pentecostal worshipers’ belief that God is present during the worship service explains the intensity of gesture and action reached during practice under the assumptions that this type of power exists. Worship

specifically shows the depth of the bodily rhetoric of piety developed under the guidance of this power.

Within Pentecostal worship, there is another kind of power that does not assume the position of direct authority, yet perpetuates a similar accountability. This power is displayed one worshiper to another. As one body begins to worship, it can be seen by any other body that might seek to replicate the enthusiasm in the actions being performed. But it also might judge these actions to be lacking in sincerity. The knowledge of this watchful presence coupled with the desire for affirmation exposes a complicated dynamic amongst equals, that gives way to a degree of competition, and could lead to intensified displays of piety. The individual performs in order to display commitment and, if necessary, penance. By making the performance public, multiple means of accountability are utilized through the multiple gazes present from bodies occupying the same rank or position within the community of congregants (1999, 172). Moreover, participants establish a relationship to other believers, whether positive or negative, by the depth of their performative commitment.

What is being enacted in any of these power dynamics, is a careful self-discipline for the purpose of mastery. The acknowledgement that discipline must be undertaken by each individual in Pentecostal worship practice is the core of such mastery. The assumption of the participant is that each power relationship acts upon hierarchized ideas of who should be the object of devotion. The hierarchy in which such power is distributed, defining discipline and accountability, is apparent. God occupies the top tier,



followed by the pastor or worship leader, then accountability is manifested in the bodies of other worshipers, with the individual at the lowest tier as self-regulator. “This enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely ‘discreet,’ for it functions permanently and largely in silence” (Foucault 1984, 192). This multi-dimensional, supervisory model of control is the foundation for discussing and dissecting power dynamics within Pentecostalism. Furthermore, the discussion of any of the above power dynamics distinguishes the existence of an audience, situating worship as performance. Each tier of the hierarchy serves as an audience for the one beneath it, and is equipped with the ability to judge, correct, and affirm.

Finally, it is relevant to discuss the role of power at the individual level. Each body has a measure of choice in the output of movement based upon the interpretation of belief or decree. This can be defined as corporeal power, in which each participant, while adhering to the basic structure of Pentecostalism, “modif[ies] the movement so as to develop a personal relationship with it... They may imbue the movement with personal meanings...so as to attain a greater fervency” (Foster 1998, 10). The individuality of each practitioner is maintained to a degree, so long as the modifications made do not interrupt the original intent of worshiping. The surrendering of power to a being of higher status is relevant in understanding the degree of corporeal power that an individual can claim.

Religious studies scholar Kimerer LaMothe states,

[Believers” trust the spoken and written words to guide them in finding more bodily movements to make that will also bear witness to the pleasure and power of God moving in and through them...their patterns of bodily movements have stirred in them a desire to move in ways that will align with the power that those patterns are enabling them to perceive as real. They want to submit. (LaMothe 2014, 69)

And in submitting, they are both maintaining and relinquishing power. However, the surrender of power, because it is a choice, is a form of power in its own right. The circular maintenance of power at the individual level lends directly into why and how bodies adhere to Pentecostalism. This does not assume that each body always aligns beneath the strictures of this practice, but rather that the benefits of participation outweigh the detriments.

This conscious ascription to the tenets of Pentecostalism opens the body to learning the vernacular, physical and verbal, associated with it. It is here that the application of learning can be viewed as a choreographic process. In this process, the power passed from a single figurehead such as God or a pastor, or between believers contributes to the way in which choreography is generated. After power is enacted to produce choreography, what logically follows is the desire to perform. In performing, the choreographic material enters a new realm of action due to the specific focus and intention that is associated with it.

## Concerning Ritual

The discussion of ritual in this study does not exist as a part of a binary relationship concerning belief and action. In early ritual study, anthropologists, sociologists and other ritual theorists sought to create a dialogue in which ritual was “differentiated as a discreet object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought [belief] and action” (Bell 1992, 21). Thinking along this line would assume that the more belief integrated into the intention of the action, the closer the resemblance to ritual. This assumption attempts to separate and measure belief and action. But this study does not seek to quantify the amount of either idea present in ritual in order to determine if the action can be classified as ritual or routine. Another early consideration of ritual presented it as concrete or static and assumed that ritual action had become past or vanished. In this positioning, theorists were able to see where belief and action had come together for the purpose of identifying social practices as ritual. It explained ritual as “synthetic, as the very mechanism or medium through which thought [belief] and action are integrated” (23). When theorists situate ritual in this way, the result is an objectification of practices that can be defined as ritual.

For the purpose of this investigation, ritual will be discussed in terms of a unique convergence of these aforementioned means of investigating ritual. This intersection will be interpreted as born out of the complex relations of power which compose the choreographic process for Pentecostalism. This study will adopt Catherine Bell’s term, *ritualization*, as a means of discussing the strategy of ritual in terms of action, the bodies

that undertake this action, and the space in which this action takes place. Bell states that, “essential to ritualization is the circular production of a ritualized body which in turn produces ritualized practices. Ritualization is embedded within the dynamics of the body defined within a symbolically structured environment” (93). The presentation of practice, body, and environment will be central in establishing the viewpoint for ritualization as performative.

First, integral to the discussion of ritualization is the action undertaken as a part of practicing Pentecostalism. Specifically, “ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities” (74). This description of ritualization in relation to mundane behavior and actions could easily be applied to performative action. Indeed, any action opposing basic survival behaviors can be typified as performative. By this I mean that other than fulfilling basic survival needs, behaviors usually display some kind of learning. These learned behaviors display performativity in that they are utilized for the purpose of satisfying cultural norms. Yet, what makes the contrast starker in this inquiry is the intention behind action. In other words, the focused privileging of some behaviors over others distinguishes Pentecostal worship as, at once, ritualized and performative.

Additionally, it is relevant to offer an explanation of the body that is capable of participation in ritualization. This discussion of the body is two-fold. First, this investigation will examine the body as a singular entity in Pentecostal worship. This representation highlights the individual’s choice to participate in specific cultural

practice, and the satisfaction that they derive from this participation. Before participation, there is the assumption that each body comes to the practice already inscribed with values and conditions which may or may not align directly with the practice. However, their agreement to participate is entrenched in how greatly their belief outweighs any emotional or physical objection that may arise as a part of participation. Thus, if the satisfaction of participation is greater than any tensions that may arise due to incongruence, then the participant is able to enter into the practice willingly, even excitedly. The setting-apart of body for a specific purpose allows the body to become visible, and analyzable as a performing body.

There is also a second consideration for corporeal identity within Pentecostalism. This goes further into situating the individual body, as willing participant, within a collective body of believers. This placement, as one part of the whole, directly links the body to an acceptance of station or role as befitting the larger purpose of Pentecostalism. “For example, ritualization is the way to construct power relations when the power is claimed to be from God...it is also the way for people to experience a vision of a community order that is personally empowering” (116). This maps well onto the previous discussion of power, and its ability through physical interaction to dictate strictures and codes of behavior. The hierarchal nature of position, originating with God and trickling down to the individual worshiper, distinguish the manifestation of the ritualized body enacting the choreographic process of power.

Finally, the ritualized actions and bodies in this context are specific to the location or environment in which they occur. An environment is made distinct in as much as it is the space chosen by the participants in which to perform ritualized practice. This is not to say that any space can become a suitable space simply by inserting ritualized bodies and actions into it. Rather, the environment in which these bodies gather to partake in these actions is predetermined and prepared in order to allow performance to more easily take place. It is cultivated, displaying an ambience that invites bodies into a space designed to elicit the necessary performance. It is a concert hall for piety. But the space also requires the presence of the ritualized body performing its ritualized action in order to define it. “Space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment...while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality” thus demonstrating a circular relationship between action, body, and locale (99).

### **Intersections**

The constructions of power and ritual that contribute to the identification of Pentecostalism as designed and carefully executed intersect on many levels. However, it is perhaps more relevant to consider how these similar elements feed into one another in a more cyclical and continuous fashion. The models of choreography and performance offer useful means for discussing and interpreting cultural phenomena such as Pentecostal worship. These ideas as a means of corporeal interpretation reflect back to and emphasize

the behavioral codes ascribed to by its practitioners. In the analysis of research findings, it will likely prove impossible at times to separately identify where choreography and performance occur. Instead, a complex layering of when and how these lenses overlap and contribute to one another will more than likely be a more effective means for interpretation. Thus, it can be said that this study postulates that power makes ritual and ritual reifies power, just as choreography dictates the execution of performance, while performance reinforces the desire for choreographic processes.

## CHAPTER IV

### ASSERTIONS

Greensboro, North Carolina. November-December 2014. Impressions from the second church: I feel like someone is constantly watching me here, until I realize that someone actually is watching me. The ushers are keeping close watch on everyone in the space, either to herd them or to make sure that in their frenzy they do not harm themselves. I resent being herded like cattle, and experience fury at the expectation that compliance is required in order to remain even as an observer in this space. Cameras are set up here that take a strong focus. The ushers are encouraging people entering to sit down front. I consciously avoid this, as I do not want to risk an uncomfortable or forceful positioning. Are they corralling people together to build a community, or for the purpose of displaying a larger crowd on camera? It is no wonder that it is impossible to hide.

Each long worship song is divided in time by an almost equally long prayer of supplication, subjugation, and mortification. There is virtually no break in concentration of the performers/congregants in these moments in between. It is almost like watching athletes in a huddle, pumping themselves up before a big play. The worship leader gives off an aggressive or forceful air, shouting prayer and praise to God and congregants simultaneously. There is a lot of repetition in the worship rhetoric, both musical and prayer related. This particular congregation is much more vocal than the last church that I



visited. I feel my attention constantly shifting around the space. I have to remind myself not to be too caught up in one dimension, but to remember the purpose of my being there to analyze. This gives rise in me to a familiar feeling, having been in very similar situations in the past. I am almost immediately aware of how to label this feeling now: fear. I can feel myself growing increasingly frantic all the time. The high energy of the worship leaders encourages the congregants to follow suit and they REALLY do.

A feeling of reaching frenzy is unavoidable due to movement and musical crescendos. Each song is louder than the last, and each climax grows more than the previous. Bodies reflect this as they begin to gyrate with greater energy. The increase in volume and forceful action necessitate the worship leader to shout to the point of near hoarseness as the worship draws on. The fervency appears to increase, but it is actually just sheer volume. People begin to pace aisles aggressively, or gyrate to the point of exhaustion so that they fall prostrate onto the laps or into the arms of those next to them. They shout at the top of their lungs repeatedly to the detriment of the children they are holding in their arms as they nearly drop them. I might argue that when an intense physicality is reached, as people are experiencing a “mountaintop” emotional feeling, that there is little room for actual rational thought. I can feel the fear turning into anger at the ridiculous display that I see before me. There is such an intensity among those gathered that I can hardly focus as it grows to cacophony. Additionally, as the worship service continues on for close to an hour people continue streaming in and filling the space. What is interesting to me is that there is no process for warming up, many just jump right into

large and exuberant movement that appears both extremely corporeal and emotional. I repeat later to nearly anyone who will listen that this was one of the most terrifying experiences that I have had the displeasure to encounter in my entire life.

The language demands rather than recommends, as does the overall tone of those leading worship. The musical shifts are also quite telling of what the physical expectation should be. When the music drops back, the people focus their attention on the announcements, prayer, oration, etc. When the music builds, bodily performance is maximized; it comes to a climax. There is also an element of pain in the performance of the bodies, almost as if they have no choice. Their bodies act of their own accord without hesitation in the way that will please God, the one who demands this act. Some of the most ludicrous ideas are delivered when people are at their most emotionally vulnerable state, but are delivered with great profundity and accepted without question. In fact, now that the congregants have been physically primed, they are emotionally ready to receive any delivery that the pastor might decide to articulate. The actual message plays second fiddle to the passion and intensity of the delivery.

All facets of participation in this particular congregation encourage extravagance. Especially seen here in the parading of bodies through the front of the church for all to see, in order to give their offering. Even if they have nothing to give, the bodies all move this way together. There is clarity coming after several observations: the congregants are readily responsive to the vocal cues of the leader. This is something learned, of course, but that doesn't take much time or effort to figure out. It is more of a "go with the flow"

learning that can be sprinkled with deeper learning over time once one has bought into the initial act of worshiping correctly. I have always wondered at the notion of a merciful God. If this is true, what is the purpose of constant atonement? A moment of disconnection for me comes when necessity is imposed. It can't just be experienced for what it is, it must be imperial and prescriptive and deeply invasive.

Finally, the altar call comes. I notice a familiar unsure feeling from my past that I would be singled out if I didn't react. The call of "don't let it be too late" or "are you sure" always made me feel like I must respond. I get a sense of nervousness even now at my pointed resistance, as if I expect the people around me to implicate me with their gazes, or force me physically to go forward. This has never happened, but it has always been one of the irrational fears that I held within and now outside this realm. What would I do if this actually happened? The pastor lengthens tension by giving a "last call" then minutes later requiring ten more bodies to join. I feel pointedly defiant in this moment as I turn and walk out.

## CHAPTER V

### CHOREOGRAPHING POWER

The discussion of power, applicable to bodies within a social surrounding, and related to other bodies in direct or distant proximity, is multi-faceted. There are many considerations to account for in deciphering the complex applications of power. Setting up a discourse with Pentecostalism at the center allows for assumptions based upon public perceptions to be applied regarding the distribution of power within this realm. More central to this investigation, though, is the examination of the practice from the inside. Specifically, what do the foundational doctrines of Pentecostalism dictate about how practitioners are expected to participate? Additionally, how has this doctrine been interpreted in order that those at the helm of leadership are able to establish awareness of and obedience to it? Finally, how does Pentecostalism ensure that the practice is preserved and similarly represented in divergent and varied locales?

The design of Pentecostal churches, specifically the sanctuary, is often secondary in thinking about how space can be used to construct power. A primary focus, when examining power constructions as a part of this practice often stems from the sermon message being delivered, or is drawn from the relationship that individuals share. While these latter factors are major considerations in the application of power, the design of the space is key when exploring power at a basic level. The space is carefully crafted so that

when bodies are introduced into it, relationships of power become clarified. In the most literal sense possible, bodies are able to situate themselves in either elevated or subjected positions in order to demonstrate rank in relation to other bodies. Additionally, channels of surveillance are established before bodies come into this space, contributing to careful, inconspicuous, regulation. Michel Foucault describes this as “discipline,” stating that,

[It] makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustains itself by its own mechanism and which, for the spectacle of public events, substitutes the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes. Thanks to the technique of surveillance, the ‘physics’ of power, the hold over the body, operates according to the law of optics and mechanics, according to a whole play of spaces, lines, screens, beams, degrees, and without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force, or violence. (Foucault 1984, 192-193)

This includes the ordering of not just the bodies gathered, but the perceived presence of God, as well. Furthermore, the design of the space arranges bodies in such a way that they are capable of performing worship for each other. In other words, the placement of bodies in a clear line of sight to each other, maintains a co-regulation that has the potential to hold each individual responsible for their actions at any time.

This organization leads then to the structuring of the bodies gathered in order that correct behaviors be impressed upon them. This instruction originates in bodies that have established a greater or more significant role in this community and culminates in the bodies of lay-worshippers. It is also present in the way that bodies learn and copy one another’s actions, demonstrating both the power of suggestion as well as the importance of community relationships. This expresses the process through which choreography can

be learned and executed. It also delineates a clear divide between mundane and worship actions. This is due to the applications of power perceived as a part of the constructed arena in which these actions take place. In order to demonstrate the power constructions present within multiple spaces in divergent locations, it is relevant to explore the tenets upon which institutions of Pentecostalism have been founded. In so doing, power dynamics can be interpreted with greater clarity through the examination of “a set of protocols... that will be referenced by the choreography and then vivified by the specific [worship] performance” (Foster 1998, 11).

Pentecostal churches, specifically the Assemblies of God and Church of God denominations express similar values. First, central to understanding the label Pentecostal, is the belief in the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of God. As such, Pentecostalism maintains that the Holy Spirit can be experienced by believers with consistency. As previously stated, the Holy Spirit first made its presence known on the day of Pentecost described in the book of Acts. The official doctrines for the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God state that, “The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is the model, or paradigm, for later outpourings” (“Worship in the Bible”). Thus, this denotes that the overall goal of worship is the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The protocol for this moment is dictated by the necessity to appease the overseeing presence that is an assumed part of the worship experience. These strictures dictate a necessity to continually work toward an intensity that, through physical demonstration, allows an approach toward a higher spiritual authority within the worship community. In

fact, the following principle demonstrates this call to believers to subjugate themselves during worship in order to gain something more:

All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church. With it come the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry. (“Baptism in the Holy Spirit”)

These, and other core values and statements of faith assist in demonstrating the myriad constructions of power as a part of Pentecostalism where spatial and physical relationships are central. I intend to show how these tenets manifest in order to construct power dynamics that dictate specific behaviors.

### **Cultivated Spaces**

Discussing Susan Leigh Foster’s questions in relation to the construction and roles of power, with specific attention to Pentecostalism, assists in interpreting certain spatial designs as establishing relationships of power. Specifically, the question “what kinds of significance and impact does the collection of bodies make in the midst of its... surround?” can be expanded to include more primary considerations (Foster 2003, 3).

These considerations include the impact that the design of the space might have on bodies before they even choose to enter. Indeed, bodies certainly imprint the spaces that they enter. Yet, it is of similar importance to notice that all spaces have certain designs for

specific purposes before they are encountered by bodies. As such, the bodies encountering these places are required to make certain choices about how to negotiate their surroundings as they enter. At this point, it is relevant to distinguish the general design of these spaces through a detailed account of several coinciding research experiences. It is through this complex, cultivated arrangement that the power applied one body to another can more easily be interpreted.

At first glance, the church building assumes an imposing position. It casts a shadow, sometimes literally, always metaphorically over anyone approaching. This moment of confrontation is broken up by the friendly faces that have been given happy task of greeting anyone seeking entrance. The relationship between those entering and those greeting establishes the first of many delineations concerning physical status. The role that each member of the body of believers assumes is based upon the spiritual gifts endowed upon them at the moment of salvation. “[They] trust the Holy Spirit to know what the Church needs and which members should be used to supply those needs” (“We Believe: About the Holy Spirit”). Each person fulfills their role with gladness, appearing to show no concern for the elevated or subjugated status of those around them. Upon venturing further into the space, what was initially imposing about the building from the outside changes. A sense of anticipations builds, akin to the anticipation that might be associated with waiting rooms, service lines, or concert hall lobbies. There is a shared expectation of experience among bodies present that allows them to be corralled in specific ways for clear purposes. Furthermore, in all of these settings the attitude of



anticipation prepares the bodies for common experiences to occur among gathered individuals. In other words, bodies know that something else will happen as a result of their presence, something beyond the initial gathering of individuals in a holding cell.

It is this next space, though, that is the primary target or goal. By this I mean, the bodies who have come to this place for the purpose of taking part in worship do not intend to linger in the lobby space; their intention is to travel on to the sanctuary space, a space that in its very naming supposes a very specific purpose. This is the place in which holiness, devotion, virtue, and piety can be demonstrated, judged, and perfected. The design of this space is central to the manner in which these bodies are able to most efficiently carry out such displays. The central fixture of this space is visible immediately upon entrance: the cross, the symbol of the ultimate sacrifice made on behalf of all humankind in order that they might receive eternal life (John 3:16, New Living Standard). The space is designed in such a way that from every vantage point, this fixture imposes its presence. There is soft, yet passionate music playing from speakers that sets the tone of the space. The house lights, which usually include a basic theatrical lighting plot, are dimmed, while the lights focused on the stage are slightly brighter, warm tones. Both the music and the lights combine to create a specific ambiance. The effect is a quieting of verbal communications between entering bodies, and an intent focus upon those fixtures that assume positions of central importance, such as the aforementioned cross. All this contributes to cultivate an atmosphere in which the worshiper “goes from the ‘ordinary world’ to the ‘performative world,’ from one time/space reference to

another, from one personality to one or more others” (Schechner & Turner 1985, 126).

Effectively, the mood is predetermined in order to encourage a spiritual experience to take place for gathered individuals.

In addition, focus is drawn to the stage. This assumes an elevated placement, often stretching almost the entire length of the front of the sanctuary. The stage must be large in order to have the capacity to accommodate the praise and worship team that will occupy it. In fact, the stage is already set-up with the instruments for the musicians that will come together to lead the worship service. It is also affixed with the lectern, another focal point. This fixture is steeped in meaning, as it will soon be the platform from which the most primary leader, the pastor, will deliver a gospel message. The stage has the potential to be a very imposing or negative construction, but in this realm care is taken to decorate it in a way that softens it. Different seasons mean different decorations. I have noticed a variety of decor, ranging from Easter bouquets to Christmas trees, pumpkins and hay-bales to red, white, and blue bunting. This is the first step in building what Foucault describes as, “the spatial ‘nesting’ of hierarchized surveillance” that is created “to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control” (Foucault 1984, 190).

Pentecostalism begins this organization by providing comfort before it asserts force.

Furthermore, within Pentecostalism, this surveillance operates in such a way that participants do not feel threatened or anxious. In other words, the discipline being enacted is one that congregants desire to appease. Furthermore, the decoration of the space succeeds in softening the calculated regulation occurring.

Below the stage, and covering the majority of the overall space, is the area where the congregants are arranged. Seating is arranged in a manner that fans out from key focal points, the cross and the stage. Whether chairs or pews, there is a very specific angling in the arrangement that requires not only that all bodies in the space have a clear view of these focal points, but that anyone standing at these points has a similar ability to see anyone else that might be gathered. This arrangement occupies the other part of the hierarchy: the object of scrutiny and accountability, the worshiper space. Within this space, bodies in elevated roles can exercise power by imposing “a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects that have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them” (199). The chairs or pews are usually separated into column or sections so that there are aisles available that allow easy access for entrance and exit. Furthermore, these aisles also provide the opportunity for congregants to move closer to the stage, and likewise the cross. Another very important inclusion in the arrangement of the floor space is the distance from the stage to the first row of chairs. This smaller space devoid of seating is viewed by worshipers as the altar. It serves as an area to gather for those who wish to demonstrate deeper dedication, or to receive extra spiritual guidance. In accordance with tenets of Pentecostalism, this arrangement demonstrates obedience to the following: “Since every part of the worship service is to be focused on giving glory to God and presenting His Word for the edification of the church, the entire service ought to be planned and integrated, allowing space in theory and experience for spontaneous work of the Spirit” (“Worship in the

Bible”). The space required is present in the many aisles within the space, as well as in the designated altar space. It allows for physicality to slowly increase in both comfort and safety.

### **Corporeal Positioning**

Once the design of the space has been established, what truly defines the dynamic presence of power is the insertion of bodies. I have enumerated the qualities of the spatial design that contribute to the way that power can be dictated before bodies enter. It is now relevant to dissect the interaction of bodies that similarly construct power and establish a means through which to worship. Once again referencing Foster, the remaining questions that she asks related to power can be divided into complimentary, yet distinct categories that explain the dynamics of power from person to person. First, the questions “how have these bodies been trained, and how has that training mastered, cultivated, or facilitated their impulses?” and “what kind of relationships do they establish with those who are watching their actions?” discuss the manner of passing information to bodies in order that they learn correct or acceptable action. The second set of questions, “how does the choreography theorize corporeal, individual, and social identity?” and “what do they share that allows them to move with one another?” explore the way that these bodies become agents of their learning, through self-regulated, repetitive, and focused execution (Foster 2003, 3-4). Bodies entering Pentecostal churches are prepared for the idea that they are expected to interact and exist with other bodies surrounding them in the context

of Pentecostal worship. According to the doctrines of Pentecostalism, “Candidates must be willing to yield to whatever the Lord prompts them to do” (“Baptism in the Holy Spirit”). The mere placement of one body in relation to another can be read as a creation of power in some way, even if that power is shared equally. In Pentecostal practice, this is rarely the case. As I have already mentioned, the bodies in these spaces often assume specific hierarchal roles. Additionally, these bodies rarely question placement or rank. Rather, they follow a very clear and ordered pattern of behavior. The following description will reflect the pervasive practice of organizing and imprinting worship behavior onto bodies.

Even before entering the sanctuary space, and even if that space is relatively new to bodies entering, there is a basic knowledge of the amount of power that any individual has the potential to hold. For example, leaders have been pre-appointed. But even beyond that, more senior or elder members of the church are identifiable and assume roles of greater respect and power than new or younger members. Within each division because of age, sex, and social or spiritual status, there is also an identifiable hierarchy. The locations that bodies can occupy once they have entered this space are varied, yet limited and also dictated by the spatial design. Furthermore, it is likely that each body has an expectation of the position in the sanctuary space that they are meant to fill. It is interesting that with a multitude of possible choices, regular attendees often choose the same seat in the same area of the sanctuary every week. This space reflects familiarity, and comfort, and is easily associated with the maintenance of their delegated role within

a community of believers; in addition, this space may also be associated with other bodies occupying a similar position in the community, offering solidarity. The design of the space is a reflection of the hierarchy, and a representation of how much power a group of people can employ within the practice.

This orchestration of power begins and ends with the supposed presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism stresses the importance of this by including a code that states, “The Spirit works internally in a repentant and believing person to effect the new birth [through salvation] and encourage continued obedience” (“Baptism in the Holy Spirit”). The cross, as a primary focal point, is a representation of one manifestation of this presence. By establishing this focus, bodies must train their focus upward, rather than straight out on the horizon, or downward to their laps. This posture is trained into bodies as part of the display of subjugation. It reflects an open and willing attitude for participation in worship activities. It demonstrates the continued need for believers to “prove their suffering, show their shame, make visible their humility, and exhibit their modesty,” a practice that Foucault describes as *exomologesis* (Foucault 1999, 172). The other aforementioned postures in relation to the presence of God discuss a different manifestation of how power dynamics are accepted or rejected within this practice. However, any posture in relation to this presence expresses an acknowledgement of power being enacted. Additionally, this power must be understood as all-seeing. Because the presence of God is not a physical presence, bodies are accountable to their own self-regulation based upon the rules that they believe God would

want them to follow. In this case, power flows from God back to God, reaffirming the power being asserted over participants, and demonstrating one way in which bodies learn proper worship behavior.

Without physical presence, the idea of God requires an intermediary presence to deliver instruction about correct participation, and to regulate the behavior of the participants. From the lectern on the stage, the pastor assumes a hierarchized surveillance. This position enables the pastor to see all those gathered, and conversely to be seen by all. The power enacted here reflects the pastor's ability to both instruct and control the actions of the bodies that have gathered to worshiping together. In fact, instruction is the pastor's primary purpose. This person exists in order to interpret and disseminate the message that God intends his followers to hear. As such, the pastor serves as the vessel used to pour out information and collect information about the worshiping community to pass back to God. The pastor interprets what is believed to be God's message for all congregants in order to provide a greater unity of purpose in carrying out practices based in faith.

The pastor also holds the power to appoint and assemble the worship team or other spiritual intermediaries to lead bodies through the worship service. The worship team within Pentecostal practice includes musicians that are likely long-time members deemed by the pastor to be in good spiritual standing. As they sing and play along to popular Christian praise choruses, they simultaneously inhabit the model of the ideal worshiper. They demonstrate the ideal within Pentecostalism that "Worship must pervade

a person's heart in daily living before it can be properly expressed in public" ("Worship in the Bible"). As leaders, there is an expectation that they carry this attitude with them and are able to display it, at will. This gives the congregants watching the ability to latch onto and mimic the behaviors that they observe that are concordant with their own purposes. The moment that worship begins, the worship team becomes an emotional and physical archetype for correct worship execution. Their behaviors have the appearance that they are able to reach the worship threshold, meaning that they are closer to more fervent spirituality, than others that are gathered. In fact, this may be due to a feeling among those leading worship that they have a responsibility to reach deeper spiritual demonstration in order to shepherd other congregants toward a similar state of being. This is the moment, through the assertion of power, "when a performance takes off. A 'presence' is manifest, something has 'happened.' The performers have touched or moved the audience, and in some kind of collaboration, collective theatrical life, is born" (Schechner & Turner 1985, 10-11). These worship leaders occupy a slightly lower place in the hierarchy than the pastor, but a slightly higher place than the lay-worshiper. Within this role, they have the ability, due to physical placement to observe and report about the actions of regular congregants. Conversely, they are under a different level of scrutiny from both the pastor and the other church members who may be watching their performance.

Among collected worshipers, there is also a unique balance between solidarity and control. The notion that they all occupy a similar space denotes a similar rank within



this community. It represents the ascription to an “accountability among believers” that is central to the core values of Pentecostalism (“Core Values”). This idea could have the effect of uniting them in their similar purpose of reaching a higher spirituality. As a collected body of believers attempting to reach a common goal, they engage in similar movement to lift each other up emotionally, and encourage physical solidarity. This is in accordance with “true worship” in its ability to “dynamically connect believers through the Spirit to each other and to God’s mission to redeem all humankind” (“Worship in the Bible”). However, this common goal could also breed competitive feelings among believers that have the potential to cause division. This division could in turn lead to a desire for control on a personal level, attributing to individuals working to assert personal power. In other words, individual worshipers gain personal power in displaying their piety in relation to other believers. Foucault discusses this idea by stating, “All those Christian techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have an aim: to get individuals to work at their own ‘mortification’ in this world. Mortification is not death, of course, but it is a renunciation of this world and of oneself: a kind of everyday death. A death which is supposed to provide life in another world” (Foucault 1999, 143). Each believer is a steward of his or her own salvation, and must work toward its constant maintenance. The goal of this exercise is to prove devotion to the practice publicly in an effort to gain recognition as a spiritual leader within the church community.

## **Power as Choreography**

All of these positionings serve to show how power is cultivated and distributed among the members that comprise this community. These relationships of power show a means through which bodies come to have an understanding of proper worship behaviors vis-à-vis a choreographic process. In choreography as in worship practice, there is an understanding of certain codes that must be accepted for the purpose of successful execution. Power enacted from one body onto another is central to the interpretation of these codes. The learning and acceptance of this power is what manifests as practice, specifically a kind of practice that is entrenched in the qualities of performance. This performance of worship activity “is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations. Hence, the relationship of ritualization and social control may be better approached in terms of how ritual activities constitute a specific embodiment and exercise of power” (Bell 1992, 170). The preceding discussion and dissection of power in relationships and spatial designs is the first layering the circular construction of Pentecostalism where power creates the enacted behaviors of ritual performance.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRESENTATIONS

Columbus, Ohio. January 2015. Impressions from the third church: After a “prayer moment” in which pastor, elders, and deacons gather at the front of the church near the communion table to pray over the service, the praise band takes the stage to begin the worship songs. It doesn’t take long for me to realize that regardless of the more traditional feel to this space, the practice is reflective of all those that I have yet seen and experienced. However, nearing the end of worship, I encounter something that I had been expecting, but had failed to yet witness in this process of focused observation: speaking in tongues. I am sitting in the back, in what is designated as “the Upper Room”—a biblical reference to the place where the disciples gathered before the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. The speaker is an elderly woman, and after she finishes, a man speaks out in prophesy. Technically both would be considered prophesy in this context, as it would be believed that the language used by the woman was actually a real language that the Holy Spirit had granted her access to using for the purpose of prophesy. Perhaps the man is interpreting what she said.

This pastor may be one of the most infuriating patriarchs that I have yet encountered. He uses all the classic cadences and tactics of dramatic delivery available to any pastor, but also incorporates political suggestion and shaming. His personal brand of

indoctrination is incredibly suggestive and mirror his personal values. The flow of worship does not diverge from my previous experience in any particular church. The constant roller coaster of emotions is entrenched in emotion and physicality. It is exhausting. Were I still a practitioner, I really could not abide it, as I believe that it would drive me completely insane. In this instance, this wave of emotion leads the pastor to open the altar before any more time can pass so that anyone might “throw [themselves] upon the mercy of a merciful God.” I’m sure that he actually would interpret this to be the leading of the Holy Spirit. I interpret this to be very violent rhetoric as it conjures for me the image of throwing yourself upon the sword in sacrifice. Likely, this is exactly the point. As a part of this there is also a call for others, considered to be in a state of grace, to intercede on the part of the downtrodden. Through their physical contacting of one another, they might assist in mutual atonement.

It is interesting to experience the supposed mentality of the leader. It is up to this figure to interpret when the Spirit is moving. Sometimes it appear to grow so greatly, that it becomes necessary to disrupt whatever they had planned in order that people have an extra moment for prayer, reflection, repentance, mortification, salvation, etc. I notice, from memory and observation, that these moments often incorporate musical accompaniment. It sets the mood. These moments almost seem to be dictated by the music; it is carefully choreographed to the music. Perhaps an even clearer way to understand this is to say that it appears that the people participating in the worship are so keenly aware of the power of the music over the performance of their action that they will

remain “with the Spirit” so long as the music lasts. But at the end of the music, almost as if cued, the action ceases or comes to a close. When a new song begins, it signals that it is time to move on to a new song or to the scripture message. It puts a nice tidy bow on the end of this spiritual experience. Is there a worry that the audience will become complacent and bored at the delivery of the same service week after week? Is there a fear of contradiction through inconsistency? No, I think that the variety I have witnessed is entrenched in the idea that the Holy Spirit changes the flow of the service from week to week. It also assumes that the pastor as intermediary is the only one with divine appointment from God to call attention when, through this variety, intensity reaches a high point.

Pentecostalism is a lonely practice that places the Christian singularly in the presence of a terrible and judgmental God who then determines whether they win or lose based upon the state of their soul at the time of death and ascension. Those in power in this realm will use any means available to them to meet the ends of eliciting the proper amount of guilt in order to get the response that they deem appropriate from the congregants in the space. Does this, in turn, absolve them and mark them as righteous enough to satisfy the lustful desire for piety that this God demands?

## CHAPTER VII

### PERFORMING RITUAL

Ritual has often been central in the study of human behaviors, especially when those behaviors come out of religious or sacred traditions. Many scholars have sought to define it in varied ways. What some of these discussions ignore, though, is the discourse of human action in these contexts as being firmly situated in movement, or in movement through time. This movement in terms of physical implications is not effective when made concrete and discussed in terms of past occurrences. In situating movement as a past event, it becomes fixed, and does not honor the vanished reality that has been left as an imprint, but not an absolute. In other words, movement is more of an abstract remembrance than an actual figure at which to marvel. Movement, at its core, is constantly undergoing alterations. Furthermore, it is “so ubiquitous, so ‘naturalized’ as to be nearly unnoticed as a symbolic system, movement is a primary not secondary social ‘text’—complex, polysemous, always already meaningful, yet continuously changing” (Desmond 1997, 31). By this I mean that even patterns of moving that have been learned and executed with precision time after time cannot be replicated in exactly the same way twice, nor is it effective to attempt to display the past through physical replication. This stems from an idea that human bodies are constantly changing through time due to human conditions such as aging, disease, emotional circumstance, etc. Even

when a body attempts the same action more than once in rapid succession, it likely cannot be exactly the same. Breathing patterns could be slightly altered, muscles could become fatigued, adrenaline could increase, or other physical alterations could arise attributing to slight alterations. Thus, it becomes ineffective to pigeon-hole a framework like ritual as an object, especially in examining Pentecostalism. As a recurrent event, and one that incorporates frequent alterations in behavioral patterns, whether action based or otherwise, it might be more effective to explain these occurrences using a similarly moveable means. LaMothe encapsulates this sentiment with regard to ritual behaviors by offering, “Such a moving target demands a moving method” (LaMothe 2014, 70). Though the movement reflects change, it does so in spaces that are designed with permanence in mind. Such spaces allow for comfort while individuals have the opportunity to explore different ways of enacting their worship.

The following questions that Susan Foster utilizes in dissecting social construction and organization offer insight into what the bodies do in the special moments of worship, rather than simply what contributes to the knowledge of appropriate action. Foster delineates the two ideas by offering, “choreography resonates with cultural values concerning bodily, individual, and social identities, whereas performance emphasizes the idiosyncratic interpretation of this values” (Foster 1998, 6). The questions below relate more closely to the execution of ritual actions within Pentecostal worship than they do to construction, or choreographic processes. Similarly, they are all of great

importance when discussing the multiple considerations that contribute to the identification of this practice as part of performed ritual behavior. These questions:

what are these bodies doing?; what and how do their motions signify?; what choreography, whether spontaneous or pre-determined, do they enact?; what kinds of connections can be traced between their daily routines and the special moments of their [worship]?; how is it possible to reconstruct and translate into words these bodies' vanished actions? (Foster 2003, 3-4)

reveal action, the bodies executing action, and the spaces in which these action occur as linked to the presentation of performance within Pentecostal worship. Additionally, they set up a means through which to interpret what Catherine Bell calls "ritualization." Bell states, "'Ritualization' attempts to correct the implications of universality, naturalness, and an intrinsic structure that have accrued to the term 'ritual.' Some of these accretions are a consequence of the way in which 'ritual' corrected notions like liturgy and magic" (Bell 1992, 222-223). This idea presents ritual behavior as inherent behavior within this specific context, as a demystifying technique. In exploring foundational doctrines and examining the practices of Pentecostal worship as they occur, ritualization is revealed as the primary outcome in decoding the intersections of power and action.

Again, the central focus of Pentecostal worship is the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal denominations maintain, through the execution of worship behavior, that "true worship of God brings a dynamic engagement with the Holy Spirit resulting in the edification of the individual believer and the church as a whole" ("Worship in the Bible"). It is this figure that not only constructs power within Pentecostalism, but drives



the desire among gathered participants to take part in worship behaviors. If a believer occupies the correct frame of mind, as well as the correct level of sanctity, then they will be able to use the gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows. Specifically, this references the practice of speaking in tongues, as on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles—the followers of Jesus Christ—gathered together and encountered this presence. “They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3, New International Version). These flaming tongues were supposed to have bestowed the ability to speak in what the Pentecostal church labels “heavenly prayer language” which can be identified by any individual similarly open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Garrison, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”). This speech is believed to be uttered by God and delivered through bodies of believers. The message concerns plans for salvation and healing of the lost, as well as blessings for believers.

The power of church doctrine perpetuates ideas that contribute to the need for worship to manifest in intense physical ways. The church dictates the state that the body must occupy in order to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit to come, but hides these strictures beneath the pretense of spontaneity. They state, “Spirit baptisms [are] observable, powerful, life-changing events, initially evidenced by the sign of speaking with other tongues. Neither rationalistic reductionism nor sensational emotionalism replicates the vitality and power of the Spirit’s work” (“Worship in the Bible”). In adopting this nomenclature, they seek to validate this practice as driven by a higher authority. They believe that this authority cannot be challenged, nor can it be fully

understood by non-believers; in other words, even under a critical eye, it is above reproach. This doctrine also seeks to cloak the influence of how power constructions lead to the cultivation of ritual behavior for the purpose of spiritual fulfillment. After the examination of choreographed power, it is important to examine the actions that manifest under the gaze of this power. These actions show the way that power is used and re-used as a part of Pentecostalism in order to expose social construction through changing movement.

### **Ritualized Behaviors and the Individual**

Bell states, “a focus on activity itself as the framework within which to understand ritual activity illuminates the complex nature of power relations.” (Bell 1992, 197). When observing movement, what we are initially analyzing is the actions that collectively compose patterns of behavior. By using the term behaviors, I am discussing patterns of action that individuals adopt over time through repetition. The term behavior, when used to discuss movement, also denotes an individual’s choices in relation to other bodies or specific environments. This closely follows Judith Butler’s presentation of behavior based on “a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler 1988, 6). Within Pentecostalism there is another reason for this constant revisiting, besides that of blending in with one’s surrounding. Gaining entrance into Christianity is a simple act that requires a profession of an individual’s need for salvation. But it is the maintenance of this salvation that requires continued action. According to

Pentecostal doctrine, salvation once gained must constantly be refined and deepened in order to demonstrate commitment and passion. “[S]piritual growth varies in excellence and degree according to the yieldedness and attention he affords to the Spirit who is at work within him” (“The Security of the Believer”). In other words, the deeper the commitment, the stronger the faith of the believer becomes. One of the clearest ways to demonstrate this is through the practice of worship.

The moment that worship begins, physicality is awakened signaled by the swelling of the keyboard music like the beginning of a rock concert, and the joining of other instruments and voices. Those gathered for the purpose of worshiping rise to their feet. Their bodies straighten and begin to pulse, slowly at first and gradually building, in time with the music. At the beginning, the music is vibrant and joyful with a driving tempo. This encourages emotions to grow and manifest in outward displays of increasingly intense movement. Along with pulsation, which references a bounce in which bodies lift up and down on the balls of their feet, or engage a slight bend in their knees in time with the music, congregants might begin clapping their hands in affirmation. With the worship team positioned on the elevated stage, attention is directed upward so that they might view suggestions for action that can be performed. However, there is another fixture which draws the gaze of participants upwards: a screen displaying the text for praise choruses being sung. Individuals can be seen assuming this posture, though, as a performance of Pentecostal worship even when they are not focusing on the worship team or the screen. Aside from being a position in which it is more convenient to

follow along with the music, it can be interpreted as a gesture of reverence to God. Foucault would say that this behavior manifests in order to “uphold [the worshiper’s] beliefs, to accept the authority that authenticates them, to profess them publicly if need be, to live in accordance with them, and so on” (Foucault 1997, 82). For if focus is directed upward, the assumption that worshipers are speaking or singing directly to God is clarified by performing this gesture.

As the worship service moves on, the dynamic musical shifts between songs contribute to a changing atmosphere. Over three to four different choruses, the music begins to convey a message of introspection and reverence. In the lead up to this moment, physicality slowly increases. Bodies move from pulsation and clapping to swaying, exploring more of the space around their immediate location, and hand raising. Faces remain upturned, but eyes close in order that each individual be able to shut out surrounding distractions. This reflects Pentecostal belief in “God’s ability to do more than...ask[ed] or imagine[ed]; therefore, [worshipers] are willing to take risks and expect that God will surprise [them]” (“Core Values”). Thus this increased intensity likely opens participants to the surprises that God might provide. Once in this attitude, the songs suggest to the gathered believers that they should glorify God through prostration. Words like “fall at your feet,” “use me,” “surrender to the Lord” appear frequently in these later choruses, in opposition to phrases like “filled with gladness,” “celebrate this day,” and “rejoice in the Lord” from the earlier choruses. The progression from celebration to subjugation reflects a change in energetic to introspective. Doctrinal statements affirm

this practice, stating that “true worship is a matter of the heart as individual believers develop a lifestyle that confesses and honors God” (“Worship in the Bible”). Worshipers display these behaviors by closing their eyes, or clenching their hands in prayer.

This passion leads directly to a greater fervency and frenzy. Bodies begin to move in larger, almost violent fashion. They shake their heads as if to ward off bad or painful thoughts. Their bodies begin to gyrate with incredible intensity, and they may begin to abandon the words of the praise songs for prayers of their own design that are, at times, shouted over the music. These prayers may continue for any length of time, sometimes raising or lowering in volume, bleeding into the lapse in between songs. Ultimately, the goal of this would be to reach a state in which the individual is elevated enough to begin speaking in tongues. This is often encouraged by those leading the worship service. Prayerful moments between songs are accompanied by verbiage like “lift him up,” or “let the Lord hear your shout of praise.” This continuance of sound allows for movements in space and physical engagement to increase as bodies are drawn deeper into the act of worship.

This progression may be slower or faster depending upon the individual choices of the participant within a particular worship experience. More experienced members of the worshipping body usually exhibit more expert execution with greater ease. Their experience allows them to find the flow of worship much more easily. In order to deepen the experience, bodies may also elect to leave their seats in order to expand their movement potential. Some approach the altar space, in order to pray and praise with

others who choose to occupy the same space. They may similarly choose to pace the aisles where there is an opportunity to encounter other bodies. At this point the choices that an individual makes relevant to spatial pathways and depth of physicality begin to affect the collected body of worshipers. This allows worship to be important for more reasons than personal spiritual fulfillment. Not only does this intensity become important for the individuals in proximity to one another, it also contributes to the delineation of the worship environment. This becomes the location that succeeds in contextualizing the movements being performed. Bell describes this idea as follows:

[T]hrough a series of physical movements ritual practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according to schemes of privileged opposition. The construction of this environment and the activities within it simultaneously work to impress schemes upon the bodies of participants... Through the orchestration in time of loss but strategically organized oppositions, in which a few oppositions quietly come to dominate others, the social body internalizes the principles of the environment being delineated. (Bell 1992, 98-99)

The atmosphere predetermined by Pentecostal leaders is meant to elicit specific reactions. As bodies enter, they are endowed with the knowledge of what is expected from their presence. They are expected to engage with and accept the strictures of the ritual activity about to be performed. "It puts interpretive analysis on a new footing to suggest that ritual practices are themselves the very production and negotiation of power relations" (196). This planning, dictation, and execution of power in a way that situates the worshiper as willing participant formulates the means for the constant circularity of power and ritual in relation to one another. They map onto and enhance each other; they

also integrate complementary and contrasting elements in order to demonstrate the calculated structuring and display that allows Pentecostalism to be seen through the lens of choreography and performance. This practice limits, while offering the illusion of personal control. “Hence, ritualization is not a single-handed method or mechanism of social control; it is one of several ways of reproducing and manipulating the basic cultural order of a society as it is experienced by, embodied in and reproduced by persons” (180).

### **Collected Bodies in Collective Spaces**

Part of ritual study discusses the importance of shared experience. The foundation of this notion is what allows for identification of social behavior as ritual behavior. For example, were the experience of Pentecostal worship intended solely for private fulfillment, there would be no need to perform it in a public space, in order to demonstrate a common purpose. Bell says, “The scheme of a central or ‘centered’ community versus a dispersed population is generated as people congregate together” (101). The necessity of a community is reinforced by their desire to gather. Additionally, by assembling, bodies create a platform upon which the community that they build is easily observable. This community fulfills the basic need of human experience to interact with other like-purposed individuals. Bodies insert themselves into these collectives for many reasons. A few might include the ability to simultaneously assist one another in finding greater spiritual fulfillment and ensuring that bodies

gathered to worship together maintain mutual safety and support. Together, this collected body of worshipers are able to encourage or challenge those around them to attain higher spirituality. In reaching this, their proximity also ensures that they can protect each other from physical harm.

Richard Schechner and Victor Turner describe the latter experience by saying, “a group of friends and relatives gathers around, keeps the [worshiper] from falling or in any way injuring himself or others” (Schechner & Turner 1985, 18). The laying of hands, a gesture made possible by proximity, is also a powerful practice within Pentecostalism. The touch that is utilized can be sanctifying if the individual making contact with other worshipers has traveled deeply enough into the worship experience to have been filled with gifts from the Holy Spirit. Participants believe that these gifts include the power to heal and calm in the name of God, among other such power associated with miracle occurrences. At this level of worship, ritualization enters into the realm of the contextualization. The action becomes “situational, which is to say that much of what is important to it cannot be grasped outside of the specific context in which it occurs” (Bell 1992, 81). In other words, it is greatly important to consider that the progression of emotion and action play key roles in the manifestation of the more extreme practices that are a part of Pentecostal worship.

Because of the dramatic arc of Pentecostal worship, the power being utilized dictates the outcome of the movement performed. For practitioners, the dominance being asserted is secondary to the fulfillment they gain from participation in the practice. It is



likely that worshipers do not register the power present as controlling or dominant. Instead, it creates new possibilities for the structuring of their lives. Furthermore, as Bell observes, “the redemptive hegemony of practice does not reflect reality more or less effectively; it creates it more or less effectively” (Bell 1992, 85). In this manufactured realm of truth, emotion builds as bodies approach frenzy, they begin to lash about wildly, and often grow fatigued to the point of loss of muscle control, resulting in actual falling. This action stems from the belief that it is necessary, even expected, to demonstrate this depth of devotion to Pentecostalism. Each individual contributes to and draws from the collective energy of worship. Specifically, individuals sense intuitively and observe outwardly when others around them are exhibiting deeper, frenzied movement. Because worshipers can ascertain a keener focus from those around them to the ultimate goal of worship, they in turn sharpen their concentration on contributing to the maintenance of this atmosphere; in other words, they want to keep the good feelings going and growing. Furthermore, related to the aforementioned goal of appearing more pious than other worshipers in the immediate vicinity, individuals may contribute to the purpose of the collective by out-performing others. This is difficult to prove with distant observation, as this attitude can more clearly be interpreted through one-on-one interaction. However, this individual is ultimately still contributing to the purpose of the collective entity, even if singularly motivated.

It is also as a collected body of worshipers, having shared the mutual experience of reaching a spiritual threshold through worship service, that continue the performance

together in attending to the message given by the pastor. This experience is described by Victor Turner as *liminal*. Liminality expresses an experience through ritualized acts that allows a participant to attain higher spirituality through an ascension toward and the passage through a spiritual threshold. It is the occupying of a new emotional and physical experience, as well. Participants experiencing this level of practice exhibit characteristic emotions and postures. “It is as though they are being fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1969, 95). This exposes another layer that contributes to defining this practice through its performance as part of the contextual reality. Bodies define the space being occupied as a performance space through their assembling. By gathering for worship, bodies assume the position of performer and audience. At times they are watching and learning, and sometimes they are enacting worship behaviors. Yet in displaying worship behaviors in a place where there is no expectation of privacy, it is meant to be witnessed. For those gathered, there would likely be agreement that the actions being carried out are a performance for God, and as a demonstration to all about the importance of their faith. Whether or not this demonstration is at the center, what is clear is the power of God that participants cite as the impetus for their devotional display that dictates performance. “Ritual does what it does through privileged differentiations and deferred resolutions by which the ritualized body structures an environment, an environment that in turn impresses its highly nuanced structure on the bodies of those involved in the rite” (Bell 1992, 116).

As the worship service progresses across a long arc, emotions rise, fall, and rise again. There is an important return to high intensity in the final moments of the worship service. This is described as the altar call. It is the moment when individuals have the opportunity to demonstrate their devotion through confession in exploring movement that is different from what has been discussed so far. Participants who feel impressed to do so, must separate themselves physically by approaching the altar in full sight of the other congregants. Doing this represents an admittance of guilt or sin that must be atoned through this gesture. After the pastor has completed this exercise, whether bodies respond or not, the worship team retakes leadership in performing several praise choruses to close out the experience. Thus, leaders are encouraging a return to the execution of worship behaviors previously choreographed through power.

### **Ritualized Performance**

The intersections between ritual action and artistic performance are very clear, in several different contexts. What makes ritual special and able to be viewed as performance is the notion that performance was built into Pentecostalism as a means through which to atone. What is key, though, is how power overlaps with ritual in this context to reveal the creation and execution of worship using choreography and performance, respectively, as a means. “In other words, the molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather, it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves” (99). The word

restructuring implies bodies might not ordinarily adopt these behaviors on their own. It is calculated coercion within an arena with little risk of opposition that exposes the intent behind a cultivated atmosphere. By this I mean that it is the goal of Pentecostalism is to create the context in which worship behaviors become normalized and expected. It asserts a relatively covert power that does not seek outward harm, and invites potential participants in with promises of spiritual agency. Once participants agree, under the auspices that they stand to gain special status both within and outside Pentecostalism, the practice considers itself validated through ritualization. Bell describes this sentiment in the following way: “Ritualization is fundamentally a way of doing things to trigger the perception that these practices are distinct and the associations that they engender are special” (220). These ritualized actions being performed then reify constructed power relationships.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INTERSECTIONS

Columbus, Ohio. January 2015. Impressions from the fourth church: Even before I enter the church this Sunday, I know that this experience will be different. How can I possibly expect to hide in congregation as small as this? I am still operating under the idea that I can hide in this environment, that the people around me are blind to my presence, or that they won't care about my attendance. The two previous churches that I attended made it easier to blend in. The congregations there were so large that people would look at me as if they thought they might know me or that they ought to remember me. Their glances were fleeting. At this new place, the glances linger because they know that I'm an outsider. As I enter the space I quickly and surreptitiously choose a seat at the back of the sanctuary in order to begin my observation. I read the bulletin that I've snatched on my way in, and begin taking notes. It is then that I am approached by a woman who introduces herself as the mother in law of the pastor. She opens with, "I don't know if I've met you before," to which I say that no she likely hasn't. How do I interpret this in my need to be distant? My passivity is compromised. I do not reveal anything about my purpose in attending, and she doesn't ask.

I anticipated a larger population because this church is also an elementary school. The school that I attended in my youth was also connected to a church and the population

there was very large. It even grew so much during my attendance that they were able to build a gargantuan new building for the sanctuary and classrooms. I count less than forty people here. I am intrigued by my closeness to the bodies in the space. How will this provide different interpretation or perception of action as I make my observations? Certainly I will be able to focus more clearly on individual embodiment rather than collective embodiment. This allows me not only to notice the active participants, but the conscientious objectors as well.

The ambience in this space is much the same as in all other spaces that I have attended. The emotional progression of the praise music follows a similar formula, as well. The gestural movement also draws upon the same canon that is used in every other Pentecostal church that I have ever attended for the purpose of observing, participating, or defiantly objecting. However, it is in this service that I begin to interpret a pattern within the individual worship choruses that has been present at all of the churches in which I have done observations. As a song begins, the audience needs mere seconds to interpret the mood: upbeat, sombre, reflective, joyous, etc. This dictates their emotional landscape for the next three to four minutes, or whatever the duration of the praise chorus might be. However, the arc of embodiment within these few minutes is more complex than just considering the emotional landscape. As the song is introduced, there is a feeling of warm up that exists, the embodiment slowly builds to its climax at the chorus. This is the time of greatest physical practice and exploration. This process seems to begin again, though, at the outset of every verse, chorus combination. The emotion and physicality are

exacerbated by the entrance of any bridge material that might represent dynamic contrast, or key change. These mini roller-coaster moments are conspicuous in every new praise song that is introduced, like beginning over and over and over again emotionally. The execution of these moments of high and low is exhausting. Each time you come to a climax it should be greater than your previous climax.

I notice a boy, no more than eleven or twelve. He is sitting down the row from me. His chair abuts a door. It is as if he is trying to get as far away as possible without leaving the space. This reminds me of all the many ways that I attempted to distance myself from regular Sunday services. I would move farther and farther away from the front, though my mother always sat in the fourth row, in the center aisle. I did this until I succeeded in removing myself from the service completely. I tried to hide in my dad's office as church was going on. I was around this boy's age, I think, when this behavior started. Eventually, I started to volunteer in the nursery as a way to creatively escape being in a service where I was bored, and, if I'm being honest, growing increasingly uncomfortable. This boy looks disinterested and unaffected by the worship going on around or in front of him, even in the presence of the loudest worship band that I have yet encountered as a part of this research. He appears disconnected, but for the smallest tapping of his toes on the floor, which he can barely reach even in his slouched, sleepy posture. Eventually, a woman comes to sit beside this boy. Is this a punishment? I note that she was originally sitting on the left-hand side of the sanctuary about halfway toward

the front. Her stoic, remonstrative posture next to him attempts control. Soon, I see the boy leave. He does not return for the rest of the service.

Only the children and youth are passive in this practice. Perhaps they have not yet received enough training. Perhaps they are experiencing dissonance. When I was young and in church, there came a point in the service where all children would be dismissed for children's church. I never wanted to go. I thought that this might be because I wanted to be treated as an adult. But as I grew, I wanted less and less to be in the service at all. I believe that children are very sensitive at an early age to the things that they like and dislike. What is built into this system, though, that encourages life-long return visitors? Maybe it is the inherent guilt with which we are indoctrinated. This is a powerful emotion that is difficult if not impossible to overcome. The language is so imperative that resistance is painful. This is a very difficult area to negotiate. The shaming involved in the moments of worship is difficult to forget. The absolute belief in the truth of the message being delivered is what makes breaking this cycle nearly unfathomable.



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

The many assertions of power along with ritual performances combine to distinguish the unique behaviors associated with Pentecostal worship. Furthermore, these facets do not just explain the construction of this particular practice. Rather, Pentecostalism is defined by the intersection of power and ritual action. In the ongoing practice of Pentecostalism, the collision of these two ideas, as well their separate analyses, are shaped and reshaped to fit the needs of those advocating for its continuance. Those within the practice, particularly those in positions of greater authority, likely would not discuss the practice in such basic terms. They would, no doubt, wish to display it in terms that identify and reaffirm the power of God as the central and most important initiator of the practice. Their ability to interpret the words of God from the Bible into doctrinal codes and strictures further justifies Pentecostalism as singular and divine, as correct and elite. The Biblical passage, “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” serves as support (Matthew 7:14, New International Version). Christianity translates this text in order to perpetuate the idea that few can know and find the true path to salvation, and such a path is difficult to discover; yet, Pentecostals remain assured of their correctness above any divergent interpretations. However, in this case, “we can say that practice sees what it intends to accomplish, but it

does not see the strategies it uses to produce what it actually does accomplish” (Bell 1992, 87). In summation, those within the practice interpret one means through which their practice is justified, while alternate analysis reveals opposing possibilities.

It is difficult to distinguish the specific merits of Biblical support versus the support of social observation. One is entrenched in abstraction, and one represents a more objectivist exploration. Within this study, these approaches would intersect, though, in agreeing that power is present. Whether power from God or power from physical interferences, this power dictates the actions that should take place. It defines the behavioral manifestation of ritualized performance. “[R]itualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful. Such privileged distinctions may be drawn in a variety of culturally specific ways that render the ritualized acts dominant in status” (90). The attitude of participants within this practice reflects privilege. The setting apart of this denomination of Christianity from others, as well as from other cultural practices, denotes and elevates it. Their beliefs protect their higher status. Yet, this also reflects another utilization of power by practitioners based upon the action and belief at the foundation of Pentecostalism.

At the start of the worship service the atmosphere is predetermined. The manner in which bodies can occupy the space and arrange themselves is also predetermined. The role each individual will fill has already been established, as well. These are representation of the subversive assertions of power that construct worship in any religious practice, specifically Pentecostalism. What makes power delineations so stark in

this particular brand of worship, though, is the expectation that drives it. By this I mean that bodies entering into this space are endowed with a duty to draw in the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to prove their piety. They play their parts with zeal and situate themselves in full readiness to deepen their learning through their practice.

In the moments of climax, we can witness the clearest examples of worship performance. Most literally, bodies take up the actions of worship. The longer the service progresses, the greater the opportunity for the individual to reach their greatest spiritual potential. They allow themselves to be driven by the idea that the Holy Spirit has entered into the space that they occupy. This being provides direct access to God, because it represents a part of God. Pentecostal worshipers invoke this presence by allowing their physicality to match their increasing spirituality. The only way to reach full potential, however, is to convince God through the Holy Spirit, that their movement is genuine. They perform with frenzy and intensity in order to allow spirit, mind, and body to open to the potential for speaking in tongues, or similar spiritual gifts.

As the worship service draws to a close bodies display a sensitivity to all the things that have taken place. They have taken part in the performance of the material that has been carefully choreographed by those in positions of power. Their continued attendance leads to the deepening of their understanding of the choreography being explained and required as a part of pious display. The repetition primes participants for a consonant agreement with the requirements of the practice. They must return time after time because it is necessary to constantly affirm doctrinal beliefs. For if they are separate

from the power being asserted in this practice, might it cease to hold significance? If they are not constantly having strictures described to them, might they begin to question why they are necessary? Bell states, “A lived ‘ordering’ of power means that hegemony is neither singular nor monolithic; to be at all it must be reproduced, renewed, and even resisted in an enormous variety of practices” (83). When the ability to renew disappears, so might the power that dictates the strictures under which an individual must operate.

Within Pentecostal worship, specifically, the actions performed reflect the convergence of power and ritual. The design of power, spatially and corporeally, contribute to ritualized performance. The relationship shared between these two ideas is a circular relationship in which one does not exist without the other, or rather, the existence of one idea contributes directly to the other. This study has demonstrated a way in which power is exacted spatially as well as between bodies in order to imprint the values associated with belief. This learning translates into the execution of such values while still under the strictures of the power that created them. Additionally, this study has demonstrated that the individual that chooses to participate in this practice is endowed with certain qualities that allows for a passive, even eager, acceptance of its tenets. This body is created because of the strictures placed upon it. Bell expands this by saying:

Specific relations of domination and subordination are generated and orchestrated by the participants themselves simply by participating. Within the intricacies of this objectification and embodiment lies the ability of ritualization to create the social bodies in the image of relationships of power, social bodies that are these very relationships of power. If it is at all accurate to say that ritualization

controls—by modeling, defining, molding, and so on—it is this type of control that must be understood (207).

The connotation of the word control here describes the placement of willing participants within a specific relationship. While it is clear that this relationship is one where some seek to subvert the others through positioning and suggestion, the action to undercut is a passive one.

At this point, I consider it relevant to discuss the role of the passive observer in this research. When I entered into this study, it was my goal to maintain a certain amount of distance from those that I would be observing. The purpose for this attempt was two-fold. First, it was my desire to observe uninterrupted, genuine Pentecostal worship. If the congregants were made aware of my presence, might their usual pattern of worshipping be disturbed in some way, ultimately tainting the observation? Second, I believed that as someone deeply familiar with Pentecostalism that I would be able to negotiate the nuances of the space in order to slip in and out of hiding. However, even the most clever individual can rarely navigate new territory well enough to escape the gaze of seasoned attendees.

In observation, I constantly recalled the final question posed by Susan Foster: “how is the body of the researcher/writer implicated in the investigation?” (Foster 2003, 4). I came to understand that my presence could not go unnoticed. I was greeted, my hand was shaken, I was hugged, and even had the distinct pleasure to be forcibly corralled into a seat that I did not wish to occupy. In every space I entered, I made an imprint. My

intentions joined with the intentions of those around me. In other words, their purpose in reaching spiritual fulfillment served my purpose of observing them in these actions. As I accepted this, I began to consider myself as a different kind of audience. I served as witness to the occurrences within this particular cultural performance. “Researchers and theorists are repositioned in performance theory: no longer peering in through the window, they are now comfortably seated as members of the audience for whom the performance is being presented” (Bell 1992, 39). Yet, being an audience member comes with implication. The appraising eye of the researcher as audience member comes with a necessity to discuss opposing viewpoints. These viewpoints dictate the way that observations are interpreted, and the direction that the research may take both in the immediate and the distant future.

It is of further relevance to state that this particular study deserves further inquiry. Within this incarnation, the center of this investigation examined primarily the willing and supportive participant. What is left out of this consideration is the means through which the calculated power used in Pentecostalism begins to deteriorate and ceases to empower or offer fulfillment to individuals. When this breakdown occurs and power begins to shift, it is of interest to consider what relationship such an individual can assume in connection to the community that they were once happy to be a part of. Originally, a worshiper’s complicity with the practice leads them toward submission. That is, until their agreement is outweighed by their skepticism, until they no longer consent to unquestioning participation. LaMothe states,

The degree to which a person can tolerate such dissonance is relative to the extent to which movement patterns associated with membership open experiences of power and affirmation that are stronger within a person than the pain of the dissonance – experiences that may even enable the person to deal with the pain that the dissonance is creating – or that are stronger than the potential pain of leaving the community. (LaMothe 2014, 69)

With this in mind, the future of this research lies in deeper interaction with the participants within Pentecostalism. In conducting this inquiry, many new questions arose. Moving forward, it would be interesting to delve into the past of individuals in order to attempt to understand the method of learning that was undertaken. This would likely require encountering participants outside the worship environment and delving deeply into the experiences that led them to the practice in which they participate.

It would also be of interest to learn when or if any individuals had ever experienced moments of discomfort or offense while practicing their worship, or at any time surrounding the worship experiences. Bell maintains that “most members of the[se] sectarian communit[ies are] ‘simultaneously both believers and skeptics’ ” (Bell 1992, 184). If this is true, are believers able to set aside these objections in order to continue worshipping? Similarly, is there a time and place in which it might be appropriate to voice concerns or disagreements that arise within the believer to those in a position of authority so that they can be more sensitive? Will they be more sensitive? “Ideologies function as such by not requiring complete faith in each tenet or idea; all that is required is consent” (190). What could happen in order that this consent be removed? Furthermore, it would be of similar interest to seek out those individuals who have experienced such

deep separation that they feel they can no longer take part in the practice. As this inquiry continues, and in order to more clearly parallel dance with Pentecostalism, it is vital to elicit first hand information. This would be done in order to discuss happy participation opposed to disenchanted separation, and the myriad constructions and relations of power and ritualization that contribute to this knowledge.

In closing, I would reiterate that the center of this study was the discussion of two similarly impermanent and changing practices as related. From one execution to the next, practitioners experience slight difference. This is because, for the most part, these practices deal in ethereal permanence. In other words, they exist in the moments of their performance, and then vanish. But they are not part of a collection of human action that requires them to become concrete past occurrences for the purpose of objectification. Dance as a practice that typifies bodily movement through time maps onto similar practices that define themselves as distinguished by corporeal action. This corporeality is fluid, and as such, can only be expressed in the moment in which it exists. As each new iteration presents itself, a new interpretation is not only possible, but necessary.

“Choreography challenges the dichotomization of verbal and nonverbal cultural practices by asserting the thought-filledness of movement and the theoretical potential of bodily action” (Foster 1998, 29). The words of Susan Foster set up a beautiful moving lens through which to examine social constructions with physicality at the center. It looks beyond objectification as the examination of a past, stagnant artifacts, and sets it within a new kind of learning. Choreography does not exist, though, without the intention toward



performance. Judith Butler expresses the way in which individuals come to accept the expectations of practices within which they find themselves. The “body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretation within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler 1988, 9). Whether this is a practice that they came to by choice or not, what she offers is a means to understand the climate under which performance can take place. In one of my observations, the pastor referred to Christianity as “the great confession.” My observations render a different interpretation: Christianity is not the great confession, it is the great dance. A dance that constantly must negotiate the consonance and dissonance within it. As the study of Pentecostalism moves closer to the individual in an effort to understand more clearly the back and forth between compliance with or divergence from the power being asserted, it is my hope that performance studies will grow to include more viewpoints. With this growth the consideration for a multi-faceted dissection of cultural phenomena may arise, allowing dance to be one of many potential frameworks for the demystification of social and cultural construction.

## REFERENCES

- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* v40 no4 (1988): 519-31
- Desmond, Jane C. ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003): 395-412.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Gender." *Signs* 24 (1998): 1-33.
- Foucault, Michel. *Religion and Culture*. Selected and edited by Jeremy R. Carrette. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rainbow; Translated by Robert Hurley and others. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rainbow. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.
- Garrison, Alton. "Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Our Core Doctrines." AG iValue Video Series, Assemblies of God General Presbytery, Springfield, MO, 2010. [http://ag.org/top/beliefs/our\\_core\\_doctrines/baptism\\_HS/](http://ag.org/top/beliefs/our_core_doctrines/baptism_HS/).
- LaMothe, Kimerer. "Transformation: An Ecometric Approach to the Study of Ritual Dance." *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities* 1 (2014): 57-72.
- Schechner, Richard & Victor Turner. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publications, 1969.

- “Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths: Our 16 Fundamental Truths.” AG Fundamental Truths, Assemblies of God General Presbytery, Springfield, MO, 2010. [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement\\_of\\_Fundamental\\_Truths/sft\\_full.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_full.cfm).
- “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” AG position paper, Assemblies of God General Presbytery, Springfield, MO, 2010. [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/index.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/index.cfm).
- “The Security of the Believer.” AG position paper, Assemblies of God General Presbytery, Springfield, MO, 1978. [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_4178\\_security.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4178_security.pdf).
- “Worship in the Bible.” AG position paper, Assemblies of God General Presbytery, Springfield, MO, 2008. [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_Worship\\_in\\_the\\_Bible.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_Worship_in_the_Bible.pdf).
- “What We Believe: About the Holy Spirit.” CGGC What We Believe, Churches of God General Conference, Findlay, 2013. <http://www.cggc.org/about/what-we-believe/about-the-holy-spirit/>.
- “Core Values.” CGGC Core Values, Churches of God General Conference, Findlay, 2015. <http://www.cggc.org/about/core-values/>.